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Scott - McMaster's Letters on Civil Govt. - 1832.



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435
CALM EXAMINATION

DR. MCMASTER'S LETTERS

CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

REV. DAVID SCOTT.

NEWBURGH:

PRINTED BY CHARLES D. FISHBURN, AT THE OFFICE OF THE
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6
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Calm Examination

OF DR. McMASTER'S LETTERS ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT,

These letters which are four in number, consider so many distinct views of civil government, particularly in application to the United States of America.

The first letter embraces the "origin, character, and duties of civil government." The second considers "the moral estimate of the civil institutions of the United States." The third gives a view of the "character of the federal government." And in the fourth "objections" are "considered."

Viewed as a literary production these letters are very respectable; and in point of ingenuity do more than support the former credit of their author. We have always been disposed to allow Dr. McMaster more than mediocrity of talent; and the adroitness with which he has conducted his subject in the present case, shows that we have not been mistaken. We would have been glad to have had an opportunity of saying as much in behalf of his candor in conducting the inquiry. Here we are compelled to stop short, in the expression of approbation. There is often in these letters more ingenuity than sound argument; and it happens not unfrequently that the argument is more solid than fairly and logically applied. Throughout there is a kind of intellectual legerdemain, well fitted to carry along with it superficial readers, which disappears upon a closer investigation, leaving only a pretending plausibility, instead of the satisfactory conviction of truth. Those readers whose minds are already made up on this subject, and anxious to act on the decision, and have been waiting only till they could obtain a pretext for so great a practical change as the view of civil government here advocated necessarily leads to, among reformed Presbyterians, will hail these letters, not only as an apology, but as a vindication of their opinions on civil government.

It is not intended to pass a universal censure upon all the opinions which this pamphlet contains, nor to insinuate that the reasoning by which they are supported is always fallacious. But in many instances, while we assent to the statement in its abstract form, and admit the weight of the reasoning by which it is sustained, we are compelled to dissent from the use to which it is applied. A statement of principle may be correct; but the particular application of it may be erroneous; or the prin-

principle may be correct, and the application legitimate, but from it, false conclusions may be derived. The effect of the whole will be to mislead. It is not difficult for an ingenious writer in this way to bewilder his readers; nor does it seldom happen, that an author, writing under the influence of preconceived opinions, may impose upon himself, either by making an illogical use of a sound principle, or by deducing from it false inferences. On the other hand it may happen that the conclusions are fairly deduced from the principle laid down in the premises; but the principle is assumed; it may be either partly or wholly erroneous.

All these fallacies are found in the letters of Dr. McMaster on civil government. Those who have not been accustomed to examine long processes of ratiocination, may find it difficult to detect the incorrect principle, guard against the improper use of that which is correct, or perceive the erroneous deduction; for the sake of such is this examination undertaken.

The first letter contains seven distinct positions, embracing the "origin, character, and duties of civil government."

The first position is defective, both as it respects the end of civil government, and the standard by which it is to be constituted and administered. "Good to man" is the only end assigned in this position to the ordinance of magistracy; and the law of nature, the only standard of its constitution and administration. We give the position entire in the writer's own words. "Civil government is the ordinance of God, as the Creator and Governor of the world, for good to man, founded on the moral law of our social nature, the principles of which law are the standard of its actual constitution and administration." It is thought that the view of civil government which contains such radical defects, will neither be accurate nor scriptural. Magistracy which is an ordinance of God, is considered without having any reference to his glory, or any respect to his revealed law, in its formation and exercise. "Good to man" is indeed the immediate end; but there is another, which is ultimate, and more important—the glory of God.—The Westminster Confession of Faith, the most excellent of all human systems, specially includes this, as the great end of civil government among men. "God, the Supreme Lord and King of all the world hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end he hath armed them with the power of the sword for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers."* The position then is defective as it respects the end of government; it is made to rest in the good of the creature, while the glory of the Creator, the more important end, is entirely overlooked.

* Chap. 23.

Nor is "the moral law of our social nature" the standard by which civil government is to be constituted and administered. It is true that civil government flows from God, the Creator; and obligation to obedience arises from our relation to Him, as his creatures:—But this is no reason why the principles of nature should be taken as the standard of constitution and administration of government. Every kind of obligation under which man is, flows primarily from God, the Creator.—Were the same reasoning, therefore, which Dr. McMaster employs in the illustration of his position, applied in its full extent, the law of nature would necessarily become the standard by which every obligation of man, and every relation in which he stands, should be regulated and governed. And if men are not prepared to go this length, they should hesitate before they act upon a principle which leads to it, if they would not be found at war with consistency. The adoption of such a principle would prove too much, and therefore proves nothing.

The law of nature is the only standard which heathens have to guide them in the constitution and administration of civil government; and so, it is the only standard which they have to guide them in every duty and every obligation which they owe to God and one another; in the services of religion as well as in the duties of civil government. But this can be no reason why those who have the light of revelation should refuse its advantage, and be content with the guidance of mere natural principles. The whole of revelation is predicated on the ignorance and sinfulness of mankind; and is intended to supply the deficiency of the light of nature; it affords for every relation in life, instruction that is infinitely superior to the principles of our social nature. The former is the perfect light of heaven, clear and unclouded; the latter is only the wreck and shattered remains of the law, which was originally written on man's conscience; the few feeble rays which it emanates, are utterly unfit to direct him in the performance of any duty. The light of revelation was given to supply the deficiency of mere reason and natural conscience; its authority is paramount, and obligatory upon all who possess it. For while the heathen, who have not the written law, shall be judged without the law, those who have the written law shall be judged by it. It is that by which the conduct of men shall be tried in their constitutions and administrations of government, as well as in the things of religion.*

Less attention should have been given to this obnoxious feature of the Doctor's first position, had we viewed it as a mere omission: this, however, it is not. The position is evidently designed to include all that is necessary for the framing and administering of civil government—the principles of nature. So

* Rom. 2. 12.

far Dr. McMaster agrees with the Secession Church, in her views of magistracy. Against these, the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church has been given. "The holy scriptures, wherever they are enjoyed, should be considered and applied as a complete rule of faith and practice, to all descriptions of men, in every department of human life. I have often been made to wonder, what our Seceding brethren could discover, so remarkably peculiar and odd about civil government: they always consider the light of nature sufficient to direct men, with respect to the proper requisites of it; while they never speak of this being the case with respect to any thing else which concerns the moral conduct of men."* "The Presbytery do hereby reject and condemn that anti-scriptural principle and opinion, that the Divine scriptural ordinance of magistracy hath not its foundation in the moral preceptive law of God, (wherein alone his will is revealed and declared unto his people, concerning the nature, use and ends of all his ordinances,) but in the subjective light of nature, so confused and dark, that neither the true nature of this nor any other of the ordinances of Jehovah, as revealed in his word, can hereby be known, or the true use and ends thereof sufficiently discovered."† After reading these quotations, the reader, may judge of the correctness of Dr. McMaster's position. He will be satisfied that it is not the sentiment of Covenanters. Inaccurate, however, as it is, it is that upon which rests much of the reasoning which follows in the subsequent part of the letters on civil government.

"Position II.—Political and Ecclesiastical society are essentially different from each other in their nature, government, and immediate ends." This is ambiguously expressed. We agree with it, so far as it asserts that political and ecclesiastical society are different from each other in their nature and government. But, whether they are different in their immediate ends will depend upon the meaning which may be attached to these words. If it is designed to intimate only, that civil government has an immediate respect to the outward well-being of society; and that religion respects the spiritual and immortal interests of men, we have no disposition to dissent. There is one sense, however, in which the "immediate ends" are the same. They are both designed to promote the good of man,—the one his present; the other, both his present and his eternal good.

"Position III.—It is not the mere fact of the existence of a political power, but the possession by it of those attributes which fit it to answer the ends of its institution, that makes it the moral ordinance of God." This verbally expresses a truth;

* Truth no enemy to peace, by the Rev. John Reid, p. 6, 109.

† Act, declaration, and testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church p. p. 164, 165.

but so vaguely expressed, as to leave room for very different applications. It is true, that "the mere fact of the existence of a political power" does not make it the moral ordinance of God. This we are anxious to maintain: and it has been always maintained by the Reformed Presbyterian Church—but denied by those who have differed with her on the subject of magistracy. The principle is correct,—that the possession of power does not constitute any government the ordinance of God, "but the possession by it of those attributes which fit it to answer the ends of its institution." To this part of the position we object, as it leaves every one to give his own enumeration of these attributes. Perhaps Dr. McMaster and his readers might differ much as to the attributes which enable a government to answer the ends of its institution. They might differ, both as to the character and number of those attributes. We regard this position, then, as intimating nothing; because it is indefinite. In the illustration of his position, the Dr. says, "no man ever believed the slavish opinion," that "the simple existence of a power is evidence of its right to rule." He must surely have a strong love of paradox, who can make such an assertion. Whether seriously believed or not, men have deliberately written it, and maintained it with obstinacy. And Covenanters have found it necessary to testify against it.*

With the sentiment expressed in the concluding paragraph we cordially agree. "The doing of an immoral act may neither be imposed as a term of political fellowship, nor yielded to, in order to the enjoyment of civil advantages." We have mistaken far, indeed, the general tendency of these letters, if, in any way, they will help to preserve men from sinning for the sake "of civil advantages." In this respect they are more likely to prove a snare to the consciences of weak and unstable men, who are too apt to find an apology for their immoralities, in the opinions of eminent writers.

"Position IV.—With national society, even when morally constituted, no man may, in any ordinary case, be compelled to incorporate." That civil society is a voluntary association will not, we apprehend, be disputed.

"Position V.—Mere defects in high and ultimate moral attainments, if fundamental attributes be in conformity with, and in nothing contrary to moral principle, will not render illegitimate a constitution of government." This position may be assented to or denied, just as we understand what is meant by "mere defects in high and ultimate moral attainments." There are some defects which would "not render illegitimate, a constitution of government;" there are others that would.

The reasoning employed in the illustration of this position is, certainly of a peculiar kind; we hope it will not have much

* See reformation principles, p. 113, first part.

influence on the religious public:—The direct tendency of it is to disjoin what the Author of order has connected in the institution of magistracy. “I see no reason why the power of promoting the interests of morals, as well as of personal wealth, may not be as safe in the hands of an enlightened and virtuous people, as in the possession of those who may be raised by them to the exercise of a little brief authority.” If Dr. McMaster does not see any reason why the magistrate should be trusted with the guardianship of public morality, we fear it is because his mind is biassed and warped by unscriptural notions of civil government. On this subject the word of God is pointed, and may afford to any man a “reason,” if he is not unreasonable, and withal, disobedient to apostolic authority, why the magistrate is entrusted with the care of public morals: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.—Wilt thou not then be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good.—But, if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he beareth not the sword in vain—for he is the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”*

The following assertion requires some qualification: “A simple want will never justify the rejection of a system positively moral.” Before this can be safely assented to it is necessary to know what the “simple want” is. A want in a civil constitution may be so great as to destroy its character as the ordinance of God. It may be such, as to fix upon it the character of infidel, or even atheistic: the want may be of such a nature as to stamp indelibly upon the constitution, the character of immoral. The simple want may become a positive immorality, and expose the constitution, in which it is found, to the rejection of the fearers of God. The assertion then, at first sight, though apparently very simple, may include a great deal. And because we think it was designed to do so, we have taken notice of it; and dissent from it as unscriptural, and inconsistent with the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Sin is defined to be “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God.”† Now, if want of conformity to the law of God will make an act sinful, as well as a positive transgression of the law would, then want of conformity to the law of God will make a civil constitution immoral, even when there may not be a positive immoral enactment contained in it.—Nor would it be difficult to find exemplifications of this in some existing civil constitutions!

To support an assertion which is thus evidently at variance with correct principles, Dr. McMaster has made a quotation

* Rom. 13, 3—4.

† Shorter Catechism.

from the writings of the late Rev. Wm. Steven. It would have been but fair to have told the reader, that the letter of Mr. Steven, from which the quotation is made, was written expressly for the purpose of exposing a view of civil government, of which, the assertion of Dr. McMaster is one feature. It is no breach of charity to say, that this quotation has been introduced for the purpose of producing effect. The name of Steven is well known among Covenanters: he was an eminent minister, and able defender of Reformed Presbyterian principles. If an insulated passage, of his writings could be found to give countenance to Dr. McMaster's opinion, he has no scruple to employ it in a sense that is utterly inconsistent with the whole spirit and design of Mr. Steven. But, let the passage, separated as it is from the context, speak for itself.—“There is a manifest and great difference between a simple defect in a deed of civil constitution, whereby a matter of great importance may be left unprovided for, or unsecured—and an error whereby a matter of the highest importance must be barred out and buried, and a grave-stone laid and established upon it.”* That there is a difference between the things mentioned by Mr. Steven is clear, and shows a spirit of candor on his part:—but this can neither prove nor illustrate, that “a simple want will never justify the rejection of a system positively moral,” when, as it has been shown, a simple want may be of such a nature as to render a constitution immoral in its character.

The unfair use which the Doctor makes of the famous passage in the confession of faith, “that Infidelity or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority,” we shall have an opportunity of showing in a subsequent part of our examination, where it is again pressed into his service.

“Position VI.—Every nation, in its civil character, to which the revelation of the Son of God, as Emanuel, is made, and which, according to that revelation, is summoned to submit to him, is bound to confess his name; not merely in words, but *substantially, really, and practically*, as Lord of all.”

This position meets our warmest approbation. It is truth: but it is directly opposed to the first position. The one is contradictory to the other. The one confines the standard by which a civil constitution is to be formed and administered to the principles of nature:—the other makes a confession of the name of the Son of God obligatory. But how is it possible by the mere principles of nature, that any nation could “not merely in words, but *substantially, really, and practically*” submit to Emanuel, “as Lord of all?” Does the light of nature,

* We refer the reader, for further satisfaction, to the original document, Steven's second letter to Fletcher, p. 81.

er, as the Doctor calls it "the moral law of our social nature," teach the doctrine of obligation to Emanuel? If not, how is the knowledge of this obligation obtained? It is apprehended that Dr. McMaster considers this as answered by the restriction which the sixth position contains:—"Every nation to which the revelation, of the Son of God, as Emanuel, is made." If advantage is taken of this restriction, it is an admission that "the moral law of our social nature" is not the universal "standard of actual constitution and administration of government;" that it can be the standard only among heathens, who have not the revealed will of God.—And if so, with what conscience could the following expression be penned, which we find as part of the illustration of the first position? "It is the fanatic alone who will endeavor to settle it upon another foundation than the common law of our common nature." From this, it is apparent that Dr. McMaster did not mean to place much weight on his sixth position: for we cannot believe that he meant seriously to rank himself among *fanatics*! In the first position, he has carefully enforced the doctrine, that the common law of our common nature is "the standard of actual constitution and administration" of government; and as the sixth position introduces another law which is not common to our nature, we can look upon its introduction in no other light than as designed to divert the reader's attention, and keep him from being too much alarmed with the novel sentiment contained in the first position.* We hope, however, that christians will not be thrown off their guard.

For the sake of maintaining consistency, Dr. McMaster should have blotted out one or other of these two positions.—But, perhaps it is too much to expect, consistency, in such a case. When a writer undertakes to war with the commonly received sentiments of the community of which he is a member, his anxiety to propagate his own sentiments, and fear, on the other hand, of giving unnecessary alarm, will lead him, unawares to self contradiction and inconsistency.

"Position VII.—In perfect accordance with the last position, it is held, that until a nation make it so by its own deed, the recognition of no principle peculiar to the system of grace can be considered as necessary to the validity of its actual constitution of government as a moral ordinance of God." This is utterly repugnant and contradictory to the preceding position, and affords another instance of the extreme difficulty of being consistently erroneous. Circumstances render it necessary to preserve a portion of truth; and with this the error is mixed up. But however artfully it is done, the amalgamation is never so perfect as to escape detection; and often, as in the present case, it is so imperfect as to impose only on those who

* Novel, we mean, in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

wish to be imposed on—those with whom a regard to secular advantage prevails over the love of truth.

In the sixth position it is asserted that "every nation, in its civil character, to which the revelation of the son of God, as Emanuel, is made, is bound to confess his name; not merely in words, but *substantially, really, and practically*, as Lord of all." And in the seventh it is said "that until a nation make it so by its own deed, the recognition of no principle peculiar to the system of grace, can be considered as necessary to the validity of its actual constitution of government as a moral ordinance of God." We have yet to learn how these two positions can be "in perfect accordance" with one another. To us they appear to be perfectly opposed; as opposed as night is to day. Does Dr. McMaster imagine that his dogmatical assertion, that they are "in perfect accordance" either, makes them so, or will satisfy intelligent readers?—Surely, he has counted largely on the credulity and ignorance of those whom he expected to read these letters, if, for one instant, he could suppose that this assertion would obtain the slightest credit!

Is the obligation to submit to Emanuel not a "principle peculiar to the system of grace?" If it is, as not even the Doctor himself, will pretend to gainsay, why are nations not bound to confess his name? It will require more skill than falls to the lot of mortals, to understand how nations, who are bound to submit to Emanuel, may constitute a government which shall be the moral ordinance of God and yet recognize "no principle peculiar to the system of grace?" Either submission to Emanuel is not a principle peculiar to the system of grace; or, after all that has been said, nations are not bound to submit to him; or, if they are bound, the obligation arises from their own deed. It cannot be the first; no man will say that submission to Emanuel is taught by the light of nature: it is, then, peculiar to the system of grace. It is not the second, for it is admitted in the sixth position, that nations are bound to submit to Emanuel and confess his name. It must, then, be the third, viz: That the obligation arises from a national deed. That is, nations are bound to submit to Emanuel, and confess his name; but they are not bound till they bind themselves by their "own deed." There is no obligation, it seems, arising from the authority of God! The nations of the earth are certainly indebted to Dr. McMaster, for thus freeing them from the charge of rejecting Emanuel, by this *new* discovery in christian politics. *New*, did we say? No! it is as old as "the scripture loyalist" and other seceder writings, from which the Doctor appears to have been taking lessons.

Having announced his seventh position, the Doctor says, "I am fully apprised of my liability, in the assertion now made, to

be misunderstood by some good men, and to be opposed by others, who have confined their habits of thought upon this subject, too exclusively to the consideration of what ought to be, and what will be the final attainments of society," &c. It appears that the Doctor had misgivings, as to the reception which his astounding doctrine might have. He was "fully apprised" of his "liability to be misunderstood." That he should have been so apprised, is not to be wondered at. When a man sets truth at defiance, and contradicts himself, he may expect that his readers will misunderstand him. And it is well, if he understands himself. The Doctor is also "fully apprised" that he may be opposed by good men, who have too exclusively confined their habits of thought upon this subject to what *ought to be*. Whether the term good may be justly applied to us or not, candor compels us to claim a place among these same good men. We plead guilty of very "exclusively" confining our habits of thought on this subject to what *ought to be*; and, however simple it may seem in the eyes of Dr. McMaster, conscientiously refuse to give our assent to, or knowingly recognize what *ought not to be*.

To avoid being misunderstood, our author mentions a number of things which he says, he does not mean by his seventh position; and then tells us what he does mean; which, after all, is very apparent from the position itself, without any reference to these negative and positive explanations. But, let us attend to the reasons which he gives in defence of his position. "I sustain my position by the admitted truth, that civil order and its authority *are not founded in grace*." It is granted that "civil order and its authority are not founded in grace." But, from this it does not follow that "the recognition of no principle, peculiar to the system of grace," can be considered necessary to the validity of its constitution and administration in a nation, enjoying the light of revealed truth. This may be illustrated by reference to an analagous case—the religious homage which we owe to God. This is not, any more than civil government, founded in grace. Like the ordinance of magistracy, it is founded in the moral relation in which we stand to God; it is from God, the Creator, in its original institution.—The institution of religious homage arises out of the relation in which the rational creatures of God stand towards him, as their Creator: and they were fitted for it by the religious constitution of their minds. Because religion was primarily founded in the law of nature, and directed in its exercise by the light of nature; yet it does not follow, that it still rests on the law of nature, and is directed by the light of nature.—None, but an infidel would pretend to say so; and yet, this would be as true as that civil government is the ordinance of God, when it is constituted and administered without any regard to the author-

ity of God. The truth is, that neither religion nor civil government were originally founded in grace: but in the law of nature; and the light of nature would have been sufficient to direct man in the practice of both, had he continued in a state of innocence. While our common parents remained in their state of original holiness, this was undoubtedly the case: but with the loss of innocence man lost the greater part of his knowledge, "having the understanding darkened through the ignorance that is in them."* The introduction of sin into our world has made a supernatural revelation of the will of God necessary to guide man in every relation of life. Such a revelation has been given—a revelation embracing instructions in every department of human duty. On the subject of civil government, as well as of religion, it contains a re-promulgation of the will of God, respecting man as a member of civil society as well as a religious being. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." "Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people, able men, such as fear God,—men of truth, hating covetousness: and let them judge the people at all seasons."† This re-promulgation of the ordinance of magistracy does not change its original basis; it continues to have its foundation in the law of nature—the will of God, the Creator. But it does alter the standard by which civil government is to be constituted and administered: the light of nature is no longer the standard.—When God reveals his will on any subject, man is not at liberty to take advantage of the light thus given; or neglect it, as he may judge proper. He is bound, at the peril of rebellion, to recognize the principle of supernatural light. The application of this general principle to civil government is obvious and easy. In this case, the obligation to obedience rests not upon the "voluntary act" of a community, but on the fact of possessing a supernatural revelation. "The law of nature is the rule of the magistrate's duty, and embraces the scripture revelation for its illustration and aid; because it necessarily binds all the subjects of moral government, to attend to every communication which the author of nature makes to them of his will,"‡ Dr. McMaster admits that "nations which have access to the light of the gospel, and yet neglect it, greatly sin."—And, if we do not greatly err, the man sins who gives an approval of a constitution and administration of government, in which "the light of the gospel is neglected."—For, if sin is committed by neglecting "the light of the gospel" in the Constitution of the government, the constitution must, of course, be sinful; and he who approves of that which is sinful commits sin by doing so.

* Eph. 4. 18.

† Rom. 13. 1.—Exod. 18. 21, 22.

‡ Messiah Governor of the nations, p. 34.

The illustrations employed by Dr. McMaster to elucidate his argument, are not to the point. In the cases of marriage, or the work of the ministry, whatever sin a man may commit by not assuming these relations, is his own. Other men are not called upon to give any approbation of his immorality: but by acknowledging a civil constitution, an approbation is given which may involve an immorality.

Although a nation refuse or neglect to form their constitution of civil order according to the light of the gospel, it would not be desirable to have it annihilated, and the people left in a state of anarchy. While a people maintain a dislike to the law of God, and refuse obedience to the Messiah, it is better for themselves, and for those who may live among them, that they have a government formed on the law of nature, however defective, than have absolute anarchy and confusion.—But, this affords no reason why a christian should give his approbation, to such a defective and sinful constitution of government. “If they will depend on the light of nature, let them,” the christian may say, “it is better that they take the light of nature, than reject both it and the light of revelation:—But I cannot, without sinning, incorporate myself with such a society; I cannot approve of their constitution of civil government; I cannot identify myself with it by an oath of allegiance, because the revealed will of God is not the rule by which it is constituted and administered.”

But, says Dr. McMaster, “civil society, existing upon its original basis, and its affairs administered in correspondence with its own primitive law, is legitimate.” Here we have assertion without even an attempt at proof. Truly, if we were disposed to yield up our understanding and conscience to the ipse dixit of our author, the controversy might soon be ended. It has already been shown, that the bible contains a re-promulgation of the ordinance of civil government, prescribing its moral character, and the character of its administration. “Civil society existing on its original basis,” that is the law of nature, cannot be “legitimate,” therefore, unless that may be legitimate which has no respect to the authority of God. If it were legitimate, christians might be placed in an awful dilemma: because they would be bound to approve of and submit to it; and that too, for conscience sake!—And yet the bible, which in such a case is utterly neglected, has a superior claim on the conscience.—“Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye.”

Were Dr. McMaster's views on this part of the subject universally applied, they would discard entirely the supreme obligation of the scriptures, and lead immediately to infidelity.—Religion, as has been already observed, is, as well as civil government, founded in the law of nature. Let the Doctor's prin-

ciple be applied to this, and then we will see its folly. No principle can be correct that would lead to the conclusion, that religion, existing upon its original basis, the law of nature, was legitimate; and yet this would be a fair conclusion, if the principle were correct. Again, Dr. McMaster appeals to "authorities of high name" to sustain his position. "The whole assembly of Westminster Divines, the church of Scotland in her brightest day, and the several denominations of Presbyterians, the descendants of that church, maintained and still maintain the assertion I have made." "Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority;" it is a part of the creed of the whole Presbyterian family, solemnly recognized and professed. The Reformed Presbyterian branch of this household, adheres with decision to this as well as to the other principles of her venerable confession." There is in this passage, we fear, something worse than mistake; something for which, even ignorance will not be an apology. The Doctor knows well that the appeal which he has made to "authorities of high name" and the quotation he has made from the Westminster confession, do not teach the sentiment which he is anxious to establish. It is an easy matter to pick a sentence from any writing, and in its disjoined and separated state, make it express a sentiment the very reverse of what the writer meant. Neither the church of Scotland nor the Reformed Presbyterian church ever held any such doctrine as that contained in the Doctors seventh position; although, with great pomp, they are paraded to support and sustain it. The quotation from the confession of faith never was understood by the Covenanting church of Scotland, either "in her brightest day," or in her darkest, in the sense in which it is here used by Dr. McMaster: never was it understood, nor is it yet understood in this sense by the Reformed Presbyterian Church either on this or on the other side of the Atlantic.—And we may, very safely, say it never was the design of the Westminster Assembly that it should be understood in any such sense.

It is proper to notice that there is one denomination of Presbyterians who have given the same interpretation to the words of the Westminster Divines which is forced upon them by Dr. McMaster; and we make him welcome to the full weight of their authority: but let him not drag into the controversy the authority of others, whose sentiments are well known to have been directly opposed to this. The Seceders have, generally, adopted this interpretation—and from them, we presume Dr. McMaster has borrowed it: but against it Reformed Presbyterians have testified and written, both in Scotland and America. On this subject we find one of the most eminent of the Covenanters writing as follows:—"My way is prepared to as-

certain and apply the meaning of the fourth section of the 23d chapter of the confession of faith." "Infidelity or difference in religion, does not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him. Their" (the Reformers) "principles did not lead them to disown the deed of magistracy amongst heathens, who had not the written word to guide them in so far as it was agreeable to the moral law, and where it was a security to the rights of mankind, any more than they were obliged by their principles, to disown all other deeds amongst heathens, in so far as these were agreeable to the moral law. To such a case as this the litigated passage in the confession applies; and to this interpretation of it every Dissenter" (Covenanter) "can subscribe. Neither was this passage without its own proper use; for while it made a part of the political system held by the reformers, it served as a rule of direction to individual christians in unenlightened lands, and to their own people sojourning for a time in such lands."* With this the public testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church agrees. "It is lawful for christians residing in nations in which the light of the Gospel has not been generally diffused, to continue in submission to such authority as may exist over them, agreeably to the law of nature, which, where revelation does not exist, is the only standard of civil duty. In such cases the infidelity of the ruler does not make void the just authority conferred upon him by the Constitution."† To this view of the subject Covenanters have, from the period in which the passage was penned, in Westminster, down to the present day, given their consent and approbation. We leave the reader to form his own estimate of both the folly and disingenuity of Dr. McMaster's reference to "authorities of high name."

In concluding the illustrations of his seventh position, the Doctor seems anxious that his readers would consider him a "decided advocate of moral attributes, as necessary to give validity to any constitution of state or national government; and farther, that he maintains "the claims of Messiah upon man in his civil and political, as well as in other relations of life; and that, where the Redeemer, by his special revelation, makes known his claims, no man or class of men, without incurring his displeasure, as Lord of all, can disregard those claims."—We are pleased to find so much truth on this subject, come from Dr. McMaster: and we think, too, that he has cause of being anxious. No man can read the seventh position, and the arguments and illustrations by which it is supported, and really believe that this quotation formed any part of the Doctor's creed, unless he had been told so by the Doctor himself. But

* Letter to the Seceders, by the Rev. John McMillon, of Stirling, p. p. 34 and 36.

† Reformation principles, chap. 28—Sect. 5.

the credit thus gained on the score of orthodoxy, is lost on that of consistency. The reader may compare this quotation with the position itself, where it is said, that "until a nation make it so by its own deed, the recognition of no principle peculiar to the system of grace can be considered as necessary to the validity of its actual constitution of government, as a moral ordinance of God." If these are consistent, then there may be a government which is the moral ordinance of God; and yet those who made it, may incur the "displeasure" of the "Lord of all," for disregarding the claims of the Redeemer! If this were not the age of paradox, a plain honest reader might be astonished. The claims of the Redeemer disregarded; and yet the constitution in which this is done, is, notwithstanding, the moral ordinance of God! Why? An honest christian man will have some difficulty in believing that so graceless and Christless a constitution of government can have any claim to be the moral ordinance of God.

"The man after God's own heart was a Statesman and a Captain, as well as a distinguished Saint." True, Doctor, so he was; but he acted under a constitution of God's own making, which was not only free from defects, but also perfect. The example of David then, can be no warrant in cases where the true God and his religion are entirely overlooked, or, if noticed at all, placed on the same level with idols and their worship.

LETTER SECOND,

Contains a "moral estimate of the civil institutions of the United States."

It is hoped that our readers will not understand the strictures which shall be made on this and the following letters as arising from any dislike to the political institutions of the United States, as these provide for the peace and happiness of the people: And that they do make provision for the external welfare of society, on a large and liberal scale, by securing liberty and political immunities to the citizens, we most readily admit. Also, that they provide for these in a way far superior to any other existing civil institutions, is cheerfully granted. We go farther, and say, that in a mere political point of view, they are worthy of the highest encomiums: and all this may be allowed without claiming for them political perfection. The objections which may be made do not arise from any supposed comparative inferiority to other civil institutions. On this point we are ready to concede any thing which may be asked

by their most sanguine admirers. We plead for the liberties and civil rights of men; we pray that these may be enjoyed in their fullest extent, by every man who has not rendered himself incapable and unworthy of enjoying them by his profligacy or his crimes.

Our objections rest on moral grounds. Something more is necessary to give validity to civil institutions and to entitle them to the approbation of the christian, than their providing for the civil and political rights of men. The claims of the Almighty are not to be overlooked; and however well a civil constitution and the laws based upon it may provide for the former, if the latter are neglected, it is not entitled to the approbation of the christian; he cannot consistently, and will not, if he understands his christian obligation, recognise and identify himself with a system in which there are defects in great moral points, actual immorality, or the absence of that submission which the bible requires to the Mediator. "Be wise, now, therefore, O ye Kings, be instructed ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear; kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."* In every such case, the motto of the christian should be "touch not, handle not." The christian should inquire, whether a constitution of government, possesses the attributes given in the bible, of God's ordinance of magistracy. If it does it is entitled to his acknowledgement as such: if it does not, he cannot, consistently with his allegiance to the Prince of the kings of the earth, however well it may provide for the civil rights of men, associate with it.

State sovereignty, the federal character of the general government, and the religious character of the State Governments are the grounds upon which Dr. McMaster maintains that the civil institutions of the United States are the moral ordinance of God, and claims for them the recognition of Christians. Let this be borne in mind by the reader, and it will enable him to form a correct estimate of the general drift of Dr. McMaster's reasoning in this and the remaining letters. By keeping this, steadily before him, the reader will be satisfied, after having plodded through the accumulated evidence which the Doctor has brought forward, that it does not amount, even to probability. If the Doctor has failed, as we have no doubt he has, to make good his assertions respecting these distinct features of the civil institutions of the United States, then all his reasoning and all his illustrations go for nothing.

Dr. McMaster judged wisely, that it was unnecessary to examine all the State Constitutions; he therefore limits his examination to that of New-York.

* Psalms, 2, -10.

Respecting the sovereignty claimed in behalf of the State governments, it is unnecessary to say any thing at present—as this will fall under review again, when we come to consider the third letter; the greater part of which is taken up in enforcing this in relation to the federal government.

The proposition that the State government of New-York “is founded upon the common will” has nothing to do with the question at issue. This is a valuable acquisition on the part of the people:—But a constitution founded on the common will may yet not be the ordinance of God; or it may want some of those features which entitle it to the conscientious obedience of the christian. This, and this alone, is the point to be ascertained in the present inquiry.

As a higher claim, in behalf of the constitution of New-York, than moral, is made by Dr. McMaster, remarks on his argument for its morality are uncalled for. We proceed, therefore, to consider the proposition,—“That is not only a moral system, but also a christian government, in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah.”

Before we proceed to examine this proposition it may not be improper to take a passing glance of the three general grounds of which, this is one—and on which, he rests his claim for the civil institutions of the United States.

State sovereignty, the federal character of the general government, and the religious character of the State governments. The essence of Dr. McMaster's argument is, that each State is a distinct sovereignty, and the general government a confederation of sovereignties; and therefore, although the general government should not possess all the moral attributes of God's ordinance, which he admits it does not, yet, if these are found in the State governments, the institutions of the United States, taken as a whole, exemplify God's ordinance of magistracy; the moral and religious defects of the general government being provided for, and supplied by the State governments. From this it becomes evident that if the Doctor fails to make out any one of his three general grounds of argument, his whole defence must prove a complete failure. We solicit the reader's patience while we examine, separately, each of the three general grounds of defence. We begin with the religious character of the State governments.—Of the State government of New-York, which has been selected as a particular exemplification, the Doctor says, “That is not only a moral system, but also a christian government, in actual and voluntary subjection to the Messiah.”

We do not wish to be understood as saying, that every government is immoral and infidel that does not do all that it ought to do in behalf of morality and religion. Absolute perfection is not to be found in the constitution and administration of gov-

ernment, any more than it is to be found in the personal character and conduct of individuals. And as we would not pronounce a private individual an infidel, or immoral, because, in every respect he did not attain the point of perfection, which is unattainable in this present imperfect state, neither would we pronounce a civil community an infidel government, because it had not attained perfection. But there is a *minimum* of character indispensably necessary to the title of christian, in the community, as well as in the individual; and if this *minimum* is wanting, there is no rightful claim to the title of christian, either by the individual or the community; and broad is the line of demarkation between even this *minimum* of character, and that which leaves the individual, or the community under the stigma of infidelity. Whatever difficulty there may be in ascertaining the christian and moral character of an individual, there can be little in ascertaining that of a community. If the former can conceal his real character under the cover of private life, the latter *cannot*; the character of a community is marked by its constitution and laws, and developed and applied by their actual administration. The knowledge of these is within the reach of every inquirer. Here it is necessary to ascertain what attributes are required to the formation of "a christian government in actual subjection to Messiah." It is not enough that the constitution and laws of a government admit and take notice of the existence of christianity: this could not be avoided, however infidel a government might be, when it has within its jurisdiction a vast number of individuals who profess the christian religion. Doubtless the government of Babylon took notice of the religion of the Jews, and even made laws respecting them and their religion. They not only tolerated them in its exercise; they also afforded them facilities, and granted them pecuniary support that they might enjoy it. And the Babylonian government did all this voluntarily; yet no man, in his senses, will say that the Babylonian government was the moral ordinance of God, and in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah. In a country where the light of the gospel is revealed, and many of its professors live, the government may make laws that may be exceedingly beneficial to the disciples of Jesus Christ, and very useful in promoting his religion;—but the government in its constitution and administration, may, so far from being a christian government, be in a state of actual rebellion against Messiah. The laws which promote the interests of christianity may have no special regard to either Messiah or his authority; they may be the effect of mere worldly policy, without being sanctified by one solitary christian motive. The certainty of this will be evident, if the same laws and principles which subserve the interests of christianity, subserve the interests of false religion, in

all its varieties. Not a doubt can remain, if these laws not only subserve the interests of false religion, but were in their formation intended to embrace the votaries of every religion that were within their geographical limits as well as the worshippers of the *true* God. If the laws which benefit the professors of the christian religion and help the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, were intended to embrace, and do actually foster the religious interests of Popish anti-christianism, dripping, as it is, with the blood of the martyred witnesses of Jesus who have been slain, because of their testimony for truth, and the Socinian, who robs the author of the christian religion of his divinity, and rejects the oracles of God whenever it may suit his purpose:—if these, and a whole host of others equally opposed to the religion of Jesus Christ, as he has instituted it in the simplicity of the gospel, find the same protection and countenance in their anti-christian and blasphemous religious services as the disciples of Jesus do, who serve him in spirit and in truth, the government is not christian. Instead of being in subjection to Messiah, it has declared hostilities against Him, by furthering the interests of his avowed enemies!

In a country where christians are numerous, however infidel the government may be, it cannot legislate and act as if christianity did not exist within its boundaries; unless it has resolved to raise the arm of persecution, and wage a perpetual war of extermination against it. Christianity may indirectly influence the opinions and actions of even infidel legislators and rulers. This indirect influence of christianity over infidels, whether in the shape of public sentiment, or of particular habits, acquired by associating with christians, and, perhaps, receiving moral instruction from them, will manifest itself in the laws and practises of the government. And all this *may* not only exist, but does *really* exist in particular instances, without the slightest intention on the part of legislators and rulers, to do homage to the Lord Jesus Christ. What claim, then, can be offered in behalf of such a government, of its being in subjection to Messiah, while it has no thought of Him, or regard to His authority?

That a government may be christian and in subjection to Messiah, its constitution and laws must be founded upon the great moral principles of his revealed law—the Bible. It is to be acknowledged as the fountain from which they flow. *This* is the rule by which all acts of constitution and legislation should be formed. “To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”*

Another feature of a government that is in subjection to Messiah, is, a recognition and acknowledgement of God, and

* Isaiah, 8,—20.

also of the Mediator, in his exalted character, Prince of the Kings of the earth; and a professed submission to his authority. By this, is the motive and intention to be regulated.

Lastly, the glory of God is to be sought as the end of government. No christian will refuse the application of this principle to himself personally; and whatever is obligatory upon the private individual, is equally obligatory upon a community, which is only a collection of individuals. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."*

Whatever government is not professedly based on the great moral principles of the Bible;† professedly subject to God and his Son, the exalted Redeemer, and so constituted as to promote the glory of the Most High, is not in subjection to Messiah.

Keeping in view the preceding observations and principles, the reader may form his opinion of the religious character of the State of New-York. And forming his opinion deliberately, and apart from political prejudice, we have little doubt what that opinion shall be. The man who has the fear of God before his eyes, and who is more anxious to honor his Redeemer than please men or obtain worldly favor, will hesitate before he assents to the proposition, that the government of the State of New-York or any other government in the Union, is "in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah." Nor will the reasons given by Dr. McMaster convince one honest man, or satisfy one who comes to the inquiry, unless he comes with the pre-determination of believing, independently of evidence. It is difficult to examine, and more difficult to refute the observations which the Doctor has made on this part of his subject.—Indeed, it is almost impossible; not because the evidence produced is unanswerable—but because there is scarcely any thing to answer: there is nothing with which an opponent can grapple, and take hold of. There is, indeed, a great show of argument; but when the various items of irrelevancy, assumption and mis-statements are deducted, nothing remains that will bear examination. But the reader may judge for himself.

* 1. Cor. 10.—31.

† This is not to be confounded with making the bible a part and parcel of the law of the land. The bible may be made a part of the common law, and the government not based on the great moral principles of the bible, but in direct opposition to them. In many anti-christian countries, the christian religion is a part of the common law: and yet these governments are in a state of rebellion against the Lord and his anointed. This is a sufficient answer to the argument drawn from Judge Spencer's opinion,— "That the christian religion is a part of the law of the land." The ground on which Judge Spencer gives this opinion is, that the christian religion is a part of the common law of England; and that this is still the common law of the State of New-York, except in those particular instances in which it has been repealed. But, if this proves that the State of New-York is a christian government, in subjection to Messiah, as Dr. McMaster would have us believe, then old England, with all her anti-christianism, is in subjection to Messiah; although we dare say that the Doctor *still* holds that she "is a horn of the Beast." Our readers will observe, that as the argument, if it were adopted, would prove too much; therefore, by a well known rule of reasoning, it proves nothing.

"1. The Constitution confesses God and his gracious providence." Were the government of New-York charged with being atheistical, an acknowledgment of God and his providence would be a complete exculpation. But the Doctor's proposition is, that it is "a christian government, in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah." An acknowledgment of the existence of God is compatible with the bitterest infidelity and opposition to the christian religion. The disciples of Thomas Paine would go as far as this; and the followers of the impostor, Mahomet, recognize the existence and providence of God. Will the Doctor plead that the disciples of Paine, and the liege followers of the false prophet, are "in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah? If not, his argument is useless; it is irrelevant.

"2. While it secures liberty of worship, it declares against licentiousness." Let Dr. McMaster answer this argument himself. We give his own account of this part of the constitution; because we are satisfied, that in the passage to which we refer, he has stated the truth:—And if so, by using the argument now under examination, the Dr. has sinned against his own conscience: for he has made a statement, which, if we may believe his own former account of the business, he himself does not credit. "The man who profanes the name of any person in the Trinity in common life, will be punished; but if, under the pretext of religious principle, he blaspheme the character of Jesus and profane the oracles of heaven, by attempting to make them prove the Saviour no more than a mortal man, he passes not only without censure, but has a right guaranteed to do so!"* We could mention a government, which Dr. McMaster will be ready to say is a horn of the anti-christian beast, which goes farther than the State of New-York in punishing this kind of licentiousness: for it will not admit the plea of religious sentiment as a vindication of blasphemy. Is the Doctor prepared to say that punishing an act of licentiousness which would be punished by an anti-christian government, and under which no room is left for evasion—is he, we ask, prepared to say that this is a proof of being "in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah?"

"3. It prohibits the granting of lottery laws and other games of chance."

"4. Slavery is abolished in the State, and can never again be authorized."

"5. Tens of thousands of the State Treasury are devoted annually, to the promotion of useful knowledge, in the support of primary schools and higher institutions of literature.

We take these three arguments together, because one answer meets and repels the whole. Had the constitution of New-

* Duty of nations, by the Rev. Gilbert McMaster, p. 41.

York been charged with being utterly destitute of any moral attributes, these things would be a refutation of the charge. But the proposition to be proved is, that it is "a christian government in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah," while the proof adduced only proves that it has some moral attributes; and we have no conception how a government could hang together for a single year, if it were destitute of all moral character. We have no reason to think that any such government ever existed or could exist!

"6. The christian sabbath is acknowledged in the code of public law, and provision is made to guard its sanctity." This is the only thing yet adduced that has the semblance of an argument; for it is only the semblance. It will not stand the scrutiny of any sense except that of sight! Like a shadow, if you attempt to grasp it, lo! it is gone. We ask Dr. McMaster if, when he penned this argument, he put any confidence in it himself? Does he seriously think that those who made the laws respecting the Sabbath, had any regard, in doing so, to the command of God—"Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy?" If he does, few will think with him; and it is not without reason, we say, that those who made these laws would not thank him for his interpretation of their motives. Apart from the intention of the legislator, which is, unquestionably, a matter of essential importance, there is another principle which we have more than once applied, and which will place the subject in its true light. If the fact, that the christian Sabbath is acknowledged by the laws of a country, be proof that it is "in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah," then several of the anti-christian governments of Europe have the same claim; nay, a stronger claim for the laws respecting the Sabbath, are by some of them, more rigidly and faithfully administered.

It is not possible in the State of New-York, or in any other State, where a great proportion of the citizens make a profession of christianity, to make laws without having some respect to the religious feelings and habits of these citizens; public sentiment would not bear it; and no man needs to be told that there is a wide difference between making laws from a regard to public sentiment only, and making them from a regard to the authority of God. The former is a matter of mere policy and expediency; the latter is really moral, and an act of subjection to the Lord of the Sabbath, and of the conscience!

"7. The infidel is rejected by her courts as incompetent to give testimony." Were this true, we do not think that it would be relevant evidence to the truth of the fact for which it is produced—"actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah." But we are under the painful necessity of contradicting the statement. It has not the slightest foundation. An *infidel*—that is, one who disbelieves the holy scriptures and refuses his assent

to the truth of the christian religion is *not rejected*, "as incompetent to give testimony." His testimony is as valid in law as that of the Rev. Doctor himself; and he is as competent to be qualified as a witness. His testimony could not be rejected, were he to avow his infidelity in open court. The law of evidence on this point is explicit,—*"Every person believing in the existence of a Supreme Being who will punish false swearing, shall be admitted to be sworn, if otherwise competent."** According to this law every person who acknowledges the being of God; every one who is not an *Atheist*, "shall be admitted to be sworn." And so wide is the law, that even an *Atheist* may be admitted as evidence, unless it can be proved that he is an *Atheist*.† The law expressly provides, that a witness cannot be examined on the subject of his religious belief.

Although the statement is untrue, and therefore must be contradicted, we have no wish to be understood as saying that Dr. McMaster has knowingly declared a falsehood; he may have erred involuntarily, by speaking on a subject with which he had not taken the trouble to inform himself. But whether intentional or otherwise, it shows how unsafe a guide Dr. McMaster is; and how little reliance can be placed on his broad assertion of assumed fact; and how mistaken his conclusions are likely to be.

"8. The ministers of the gospel are recognized as an order of men devoted to the spiritual interests of their flocks; and that they may not be diverted from their appropriate labors, are exempted from various civil exactions."

"9. Ecclesiastical property is secured by special statutes; and in some cases, Ecclesiastical officers are recognized by law, as vested with the power of trustees." We take these two together, for they really belong to the same category. Has the Socinian, who denies the Divinity of the author of the christian religion; the idolatrous and jesuitical Papist, who has heathenized it; and the Hicksite Quaker, whose religion is but another name for infidelity, access to these same privileges, in common with christian ministers and congregations? Then let not the enjoyment of these privileges be considered as a proof, that the government "is in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah." Is it a proof of doing honor to a king, and submitting to his authority, to show the same respect, and give the same privileges to his enemies as to his subjects? If not, we again say, that there is still no evidence of "subjection to Messiah." "In the United States all have an establishment, as well the believer in and worshipper of the Virgin Mary, as the worshipper of Jesus."‡

* Revised Statutes of the State of New-York.—Examination of Witnesses.

† The present Chancellor, on the authority of some old writers on English law, has expressed some doubts whether even disbelief in a Supreme Being would disqualify a witness.

‡ The Duty of Nations, by the Rev. Gilbert McMaster, p. 33.

"10. By the solemn decision of her Supreme Court, the christian religion is declared to be the religion of the State; and that the blasphemer of christianity, or of its author, is punishable by law." This is another case of irrelevancy. It is the constitution of the State of New-York that is the subject of inquiry; yet the Doctor, in this case, has drawn his argument from the administration of the laws. But we will allow him the advantage of an argument taken from the administration of the laws. We will admit what still remains to be proved*—that christianity is a part of the law of the State, and that blasphemy is punishable by law; and with all this admission, will it amount to a proof that the government is "in actual subjection to Messiah"? It ought to be kept in mind, that the reason why it is said that christianity is the religion of the State, is because of her former connexion with the mother country. In England christianity "is part and parcel" of the law of the land. The original common law still continues to be law in the State, except in such particular cases as it has been repealed. Few Covenanters will believe that the mother country is "in actual and voluntary subjection to Messiah." But if it is true in the one case, it must be true also in the other: it is unreasonable to suppose that the same national feature in the one country, would not entitle it to the same religious character as in the other; and more particularly when, as in this case, it is derived from the one to the other. But enough has been said to show that the argument is irrelevant and inapplicable.

The following proposition, supported by a number of distinct particulars, is also employed by Dr. McMaster, to prove the religious and moral character of the State government of New-York.

"The most devout and conscientious christians, voluntarily and without hesitation, maintain communion with the government in its official acts." Without examining the particular specifications, we answer generally:—First, that in none of the particulars stated, is there any acknowledgment of the constitution asked or given—there is no pledge or homologation of its being an exemplification of scriptural magistracy, given directly or indirectly. The oath of a witness, or, oaths that may be given to ascertain the validity of testamentary deeds, are not, in themselves, acts of communion with the administration. An oath is an act of religious homage to God. An appeal, also, to Him of the truth of what is given in testimony, and an expression of belief that God will punish false

*While we admire the christian feeling of Chancellor Kent and Judge Spence, in declaring blasphemy to be punishable at law, it is questionable if the bench had been occupied by some other Judges, whether the same exposition would have been made of the law.

swearing.* In the second place, if swearing, in the cases specified, were an acknowledgment of the constitution, even in that case, there would not be any evidence of its moral and religious character. Because good men hold communion with civil constitutions it does not follow that *they* are good. Such an act of communion imparts no moral character to them, but it may be an act of immorality on the part of the individual who does it. Good men often do sinful things; but their example is not to be imitated. The rule of action is not the example of even the best of men. The word of God alone is our rule.

In the preceding observations reference has been made in several instances to the government of England, for the purpose of repelling Dr. McMaster's argument, by showing that if his argument were valid in respect to the institutions of the United States, it must be equally valid in respect to the former. In reply to this reasoning, it may, perhaps, be said, that in the government of England, although the christian religion is part of the law of the land, there are, also, other features in that government which make it anti-christian. This is the precise point from which we wish the argument to be seen. If the fact of acknowledging the christian religion, and making laws in favor of it and its ministers, be not, in itself, conclusive evidence of "subjection to Messiah"—if these may be counteracted by other things in the constitution, so as to make that of England anti-christian, will not the same thing hold good in the United States? Granting that in New-York, the christian religion is part of the law of the land, may there not be other features which neutralize this? This is the view in which the subject ought to be considered.

Our object has been to show that the civil institutions of the United States cannot have the conscientious approbation of the witnesses of Jesus, because they contain no recognition of his authority as Prince of the Kings of the earth, and do not exemplify that magistracy which is the ordinance of God. We shall not say that they are satanic in their origin; although Dr. McMaster insinuates that it has been said. We are not aware that this has ever been made a part of the creed of any Covenanter: But we say—for we know, that it has been believed and acted upon by Covenanters, that the Government of the United States is not "in subjection to Messiah," and does not possess the character which gives a government a claim upon the conscience of a christian. Perhaps Dr. McMaster may refer to the following picture which has been given; which, if true, would warrant the assertion, that at least

* "Let it be perfectly understood that the oath is an act of homage, performed voluntarily, to the Supreme Being—and by no means, a recognition of the magistrate's authority, or an act of communion with him in his official capacity."—Reformation principles, historical part, p. p. 135 and 136.

the government has not its origin in the revealed will of God; and that it is any thing but "in subjection to Messiah." "When we hear nations proclaim, that the system of grace, and the idolatrous superstition of anti-christian delusion shall obtain from them the same regard, what is the conclusion of candor itself? Can it be esteemed any less than a defiance of the wrath of Him who has solemnly declared, the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish—yea, these nations shall be utterly wasted."*

The view which we have taken of the subject does not make it necessary that we believe that the government has its origin from the "Dragon." All that is maintained is that it does not possess the moral and religious attributes which a government ought to possess; that in its formation it has not been constituted according to the revealed will of God—and that therefore, it has not a claim upon the christian as the ordinance of God; and bearing the character that it does, the christian should do no act that may imply approbation.† "It is the duty of christians, for the sake of peace and order, to conform to the common regulations of society, in things lawful: but, to profess allegiance to no constitution of government which is in hostility to the kingdom of Christ, the Lord of the Church, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."‡

Upon a minute examination of the arguments of Dr. McMaster, the reader will be satisfied that he has failed to prove that the government is "in subjection to Messiah." And, if this is the case with respect to New-York, the character of which, is one of the best in the Union, how great must the failure be, with respect to some other States where there are not the same pretensions?

LETTER THIRD.

We come now to the examination of letter third. This letter is employed in explaining fully the writer's views on the second and third of his three general grounds of defence—State sovereignty, and the federal character of the government of the Union. These are argued in connexion. If the one is proved, the truth of the other necessarily follows. We deem

* McMaster's Duty of Nations p. 13. Speaking of Slavery in the United States, the Doctor asks, 'Do not governments, in transactions like this, more resemble a banditti of robbers, than protectors of innocence and guardians of right.—Duty of Nations, p. 19. Has the banditti of robbers its origin with God or from Satan?

† "May not a civil government, which has not perfected all its claims to be the ordinance of God, be so encumbered with sinful terms of communion as to give just occasion to stand at a distance from it, and not to mingle with its supporters in the management of its affairs."—McMaster's Duty of Nations, p. 46.

‡ Reformation Principles, Chap. 29—Sec. 2.

is neither called for nor desirable to follow the Doctor in all his observations on this part of the subject. A few general remarks will suffice to point out the fallacy of the various arguments urged in this letter. It may be here noticed, that while most of the facts which Dr. McMaster makes the basis of his argument are true, they do not prove the point for which they are used. Words are susceptible of different significations:—that, therefore, which may be a solid argument when the words are used in one sense, may have neither strength nor applicability, when used in another; and yet these words, as far as they merely meet the eye of the reader, are precisely the same. No kind of sophistry is more successful, because none is more difficult to be detected and exposed, than that in which words are used in one sense in the statement of an argument, and in a different sense in the proof and illustration. It requires more than ordinary attention to seize the precise point of the discussion in which the writer changes the meaning of his terms, while, apparently, he continues to use them in the same sense in which they had been used in the statement of the proposition. We apply this to the reasoning of Dr. McMaster. In his several arguments he asserts, that the States are sovereign and independent. This is true in one sense; and therefore, we assent to it as a general proposition; but it is not true in that sense in which it is designed to be understood in the conclusion of the argument:—Here, therefore, we refuse to admit it as true. The doctrine of State sovereignty is admitted; but not in that sense which would be available to the Doctor's argument. In this admitted sense, the States are sovereign; but this is not the sense in which Dr. McMaster wishes to be understood in his conclusion. The word sovereign is a relative term, and does not in itself imply national sovereignty, nor even national existence. The superiority and independence which it necessarily includes, must be determined by the subject on which it is predicated. One government may be sovereign with respect to another government; and yet not possess even a national character, far less national sovereignty. Every individual, every family, and every city, in this relative sense, is a sovereign; they are sovereign in relation to other individuals, families, and cities.

In the social compact, neither individuals, families, nor cities give up the whole right of legislation and government into the hands of the national government, of which they are parts. Individuals, on entering into the national compact, yield part of their natural rights; but they retain a large portion which they do not delegate to the superior civil powers. Each one throws in a small portion of his natural rights into a common stock: and all this taken together, constitutes the national authority, which in a well regulated government is employed for

the general welfare—the greatest good of the whole. It is for the better security and enjoyment of that which is retained, that part is yielded to a general superintendence of the whole community. In all cases of individual right, not delegated to the public magistrate, he may not interfere: the moment he does so, government becomes oppressive, and the ruler a tyrant. In this view of the subject there appears a kind of personal and individual sovereignty, which every citizen retains to himself. Each individual is sovereign in relation to other individuals, but he is not sovereign in relation to the government to which he has delegated a part of his right of self-government. The same reasoning is applicable to families: they too, are governments possessed of relative sovereignty: each is sovereign and independent in relation to others. It is, also, equally applicable to cities: each has its own municipal right of rule, and within this limited sphere other cities may not intrude.—They are sovereign in relation to one another.

In this relative sense, the States which constitute the Union are sovereign. In relation to one another, they are equal: one State has no right of rule or control over another: one cannot prescribe laws to, or command another to obey. Thus, they are free, sovereign, and independent States. But, as individuals have given up to society, a share of their natural rights, that they might be secured in the possession of the remainder; so the States severally, have, by compact, agreed to give up part of their governmental rights; and the power thus yielded by the several States, is vested in a more general government, which possesses all the higher attributes of sovereignty. While the States have each a relative sovereignty, they are subordinate to the general government, which has all the proper features of a national government. The simple fact, that there is a superior and more general power than that possessed by the States severally, renders the application of the term sovereignty in this latter sense, incongruous and altogether inapplicable to them. In its relative sense, we admit State sovereignty; but we refuse it in the other. In the former sense, it makes nothing for Dr. McMaster's argument; in the latter, in which sense alone it could avail him any thing, it is not true. It is an assumption which is contradicted by the existence of a more enlarged and superior government.

The States, then, are sovereign States, but not nations.—They have, voluntarily, delegated to the government of the Union, many of the powers which constitute a national character.—They are, of course, sovereign only with respect to those residuary powers which they have not delegated. Nor does any wise statesman ever pretend to say that the States are so many nations. They indeed say what we have admitted, that the States possess a residuary sovereignty: but this is all.

The opinion is held by none, but such as are under the influence of the political heresy of nullification, and such as are tainted with another heresy equally obnoxious—that of trying to corrupt the principles and practices of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Who ever heard of the nation of Rhode-Island? or of the nation of Delaware? Not even Dr. McMaster would venture his reputation before the public, by such an abuse of language. He knows no one would give him credit for sincerity, if he did. On the other hand, be it remembered, that the name nation is every day given to all the States considered as one whole—the American nation and the term national, bestowed on whatever belongs to it. National interest, national prosperity, are examples of this appropriation of the term.

Were each of the States a proper national sovereignty, then we would have “the political monster of an *imperium in imperio*,” or a nation within a nation! the existence of which is practically impossible. “It is obviously impracticable in the federal government of these States, to secure all right of independent sovereignty to each, and yet provide for the interest and safety of all.”*

The federal character of the government of the Union forms the third and last of the general grounds on which Dr. McMaster rests his argument for the civil institutions of the United States. To the term federal, as descriptive of the government of the Union, there is no objection. It is expressive and appropriate. But we do object to the use which Dr. McMaster makes of it. It is used by him, as expressive of a league or mere alliance. With him, the general government is a mere league between sovereign powers. The reader might suppose that it had no concern with individuals, as such, nor with the internal affairs of the States, did he form his opinion from the statement of Dr. McMaster, that “as regards foreign States, it presents a national front.” If it presents only “a national front to foreign States,” we would like to know what attributes, in the opinion of Dr. McMaster, constitute a national government.

The great distinction between a league and a government is, that the former is a mere agreement to act in concert on certain specified points, without any discretionary power or right of legislation; the latter is a compact, based on specified primary principles, and delegating, according to these, a discretionary power, and a right to legislate. The government of the Union possesses these features, which distinguish a government from a league.

The government of the Union has by constitutional compact all the elements of a proper national government—a Legisla-

* Letter from the Convention which framed the Federal Constitution, to the President of Congress.

ture, a Judiciary, and an Executive: The Constitution invests the government with discretionary powers, and confers upon it the right of legislation.* The government acts with foreign powers, not as the agent of the States, but as a national power; and as such it is recognized and known by other nations. It legislates not for States, but for individuals; and its legislation extends to some of the minutest affairs of internal economy.† The house of Representatives in Congress is not appointed by States: its members are elected by the choice of the citizens acting individually. These show that the government of the Union is not a mere league of sovereignties, but a proper national government: and this is corroborated by the following extracts from the writings of one whose means of knowing the proper character of the general government, and whose capacity of judging correctly, will not be called in question. "While they" (the adversaries of the present constitution) "admit that the government of the United States is destitute of energy, they contend against conferring upon it those powers which are requisite to supply that energy. They seem still to aim at things repugnant and irreconcilable; at an augmentation of federal authority; at sovereignty in the Union, and complete independence in the members. They seem still to cherish with blind devotion the political monster of an *impe-rium in imperio*. The great and radical vice in the constitution of the existing confederation, is in the principle of legislating for States or Governments in their corporate or collective capacities, and as contra-distinguished from the individuals of whom they consist. It is a singular instance of the capriciousness of the human mind, that after all the admonitions we have had from experience on this head, there should still be found men who object to the new constitution, for deviating from a principle which has been found the bane of the old; and what is, in itself, evidently incompatible with the idea of a *government*; a principle in short, which, if it is to be executed at all, must substitute the violent and sanguinary agency of the sword for the mild influence of the magistracy. There is nothing absurd or impracticable in the idea of a league or alliance between independent nations for certain defined purposes, precisely stated in the treaty; regulating all the details of time, place, circumstances and quantity; leaving nothing to future discretion; and depending for its execution on the good faith of the parties. If the particular States in this country are dis-

* "To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department, or officer thereof."—Article I. Sec. 8, of the Constitution of the U. S.

† In the powers conferred on Congress, there are seventeen distinct specifications; sixteen of these refer to the internal economy of the States and their citizens personally considered. And only *one* relates to foreign concerns! Is this like presenting *only* a national front to foreign States?

posed to stand in a similar relation to each other and drop the project of a general *discretionary superintendence*, the scheme would indeed, be pernicious, and would entail upon us all the mischiefs which have been enumerated under the first head. But, if we are unwilling to be placed in this perilous situation; if we still adhere to the design of a *national government*, or what is the same thing, of a superintending power, under the direction of a common council, we must resolve to incorporate into our plan those ingredients which may be considered as forming the characteristic difference between a *league* and a *government*; we must extend the authority of the *Union* to the persons of the citizens—the only proper objects of *government*.”*

It is now obvious that Dr. McMaster's defence is untenable. His views respecting the religious character of the State constitutions, of State Sovereignty, and of the federal character of the government of the Union, have not been proved. We have ascertained by a minute examination of the constitution of New-York, which is one of the best of the State constitutions, that it is not in subjection to Messiah. That his claim in its behalf is a gratuitous assumption, without even a shadow of evidence. All the proof adduced, proving only, that it possesses some moral attributes: a position which has never been called in question. Were the Doctor's political views respecting State sovereignty correct, still his plea would be unavailing, because, as has been shown, there is not in the state governments that subjection to Messiah which the word of God demands. There is not in the parts, that which can supply the deficiency of the whole. The weakness of the plea becomes still greater when it is considered, that the Doctor's political views of the State and federal governments are not correct. That whatever residuary sovereignty may have been retained by the States, yet the federal government is not a league of sovereignties; but a proper government, possessed of discretionary power; within its own constitutional limits.

As a civil government, it ought to possess a religious character; and a professed subjection to Messiah.—These it does not possess. “God is not acknowledged by the Constitution. The federal government is erected for the general good of the United States, and especially for the management of their foreign concerns; but no association of men for moral purposes can be justified in an entire neglect of the sovereign of the world. No consideration will justify the framers of the federal constitution and the administration of the government, in withholding a recognition of the Lord and his anointed from the grand charter of the nation.”† But it is unnecessary to urge proof on a subject which is conceded by Dr. McMaster.

* Mr. Hamilton,—Federalist, No. 15.

† Sermons on the late war, by Dr. McLeod, p. 54, 55.

He admits that "the federal Union presents but few features of God's ordinance of civil magistracy; and it is defective in provisions of the first necessity." That the State governments do not supply these defects has already been demonstrated. And if they did possess a religious character, such as a christian ought to approve of, this would furnish no reason why he should pledge himself by an oath of allegiance to the whole system.*

A constitution which confessedly makes no mention of Messiah—no recognition of his authority, directly nor indirectly—takes no notice of his religion—pays no regard to his law—that does not even recognize the being of God, is certainly not entitled to the approbation of christians. How can a christian acknowledge a constitution to be the ordinance of God, which does not even deign to acknowledge his being? How can a christian conscientiously identify himself with a constitution by an oath of allegiance to it, or by acting under it, when it does not acknowledge the claims of his Redeemer—the Prince of the kings of the earth? If the christian says a confederacy with those with whom God has said, do not say a confederacy, he becomes a partaker of their sins, and shall, in the righteous retribution of Messiah's providence, become a partaker in their plagues. The Lord, the Redeemer, will visit his faults with rods and with chastisements. "Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry."

LETTER FOURTH.

In his fourth letter Dr. McMaster answers objections against the federal deed. These he says "may be reduced to three general heads: the violation of the principle of fair representation; the establishment and support of slavery; and its irreligious character." Of the answer which has been given to the last of these it is not necessary, now, to say any thing, after the remarks which have already been made. The first we leave to the statesman and politician, and hasten to examine the answers to the objection on the ground of slavery.

The observations which the Doctor makes on slavery are really an apology for its abettors. Slavery exists; this cannot be denied. Upwards of two millions of human beings unrighteously held in bondage, are so many living proofs of its disgraceful existence in this land of freemen! After making some specious remarks on the evils of slavery, the Doctor shifts the blame from the United States, and throws it on the mother

* By the oath of allegiance the citizen swears to support the constitution of the State in which he is, and the U. S. constitution.

country. This is quite consistent with other parts of these letters, though not very consistent with candor and fair dealing. It is a hollow pretence to palliate the crimes of the slaveholder by casting the blame where it is not deserved. The guilt of the mother country we have no wish to lessen, nor even to palliate: let it stand in its dark enormity. Where she is guilty let not her crimes be extenuated. Let her meet the obloquy which these deserve from the justly indignant moralist.

But let no apology be offered in behalf of those who are guilty, by shuffling the blame on the shoulders of others. It is neither just nor honorable to excuse the foul deeds of slavery done in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by referring to royal acts made in the seventeenth. If the mis-guided government of Britain made and enforced such wicked and oppressive acts under the control of the Stuarts, this insatuated policy ended with the British revolution, which drove that incorrigible family from the throne. And certainly, the authority of Britain, in this and every subject of government in the United States, ended with the revolution of America. From that moment forward, British legislation could neither make nor unmake slaves. On the mother country, down to this date, may the blame of slavery be fairly laid; and on her too may be charged the consequences of the *then existing slavery* to a certain extent. The government of the United States is not faulted for the existence of slavery at the time when she threw off the authority of the mother country; nor is she faulted because she did not immediately abolish it. This was, perhaps, not practicable. It is admitted to be no easy task to get rid of any evil when once produced: in the case of slavery it is peculiarly so. It would not be safe, all at once to open the portals of freedom and equal rights to a numerous population debased by slavery. If the United States could not do this with safety, they had it, however, in their power to commence the work of emancipation; and had there been a prevailing feeling of sympathy, and a love of justice towards the slave population, this would have been done. The bond of confederation would have embraced a provision for either the immediate or gradual and speedy abolition of slavery. But no—the ill-used son of Africa was still to be excluded the pale of humanity, and held excommunicated from the precious rights of man! For this, we blame the government of the United States; and for this shall she be visited by the retributive justice of God. Such flagrant national sins cannot pass unpunished in the government of Him who is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works.*

*“(O America, what hast thou to account for on the head of Slavery! Thou hast made provision for increasing the number, and continuing the bondage of thy slaves. Thy judgments may tarry, but they will assuredly come.”—Sermon on Slavery, by Dr. McLeod, p. 19.

If the United States had felt but a tithe of the interest for the colored population, which they did for delivering the States from the domination of Britain, the name of slave would long since have ceased; and the otherwise sacred soil of freedom would not now have been polluted by the footstep of a bondman. By a series of wise regulations, in a few years, they might have gradually but effectually abolished slavery. And, because they despised the cry of the oppressed, sin lies at their door.

Futile is the apology, that the evil of continuing slavery is chargeable only on the slave-holding States. It is chargeable on the whole land.† It was not enough that the non-holding States should have abolished it within their own limits: this was so far good; but they ought not to have countenanced the other States in their continuance of slavery by a moral association with them, while persevering in it. It is said that the Southern States would not have consented to the abolition of slavery. We doubt the accuracy of the opinion. It is rather an excuse for doing an evil, than a sufficient reason why it could not have been avoided. Had the non-holding States made this question "*a sine qua non*" of their accession to the bond of confederacy, it is probable that it might have been yielded. And if the slave-holding States would not have consented, what then? Must the former confederate with them on these terms? A refusal to join in the Union we are aware, would have been hazardous. An effective union of the States was of the utmost importance; but it was possible to obtain it at too great a price. To confederate, for moral purposes, with others, when, in a certain sense, their immoralities must be recognized, was a price too great for even the benefits of the Union. At best, it has only the recommendation of expediency—a principle which no man nor community of men ought to plead for their moral doings. Mere expediency often leads to direct violations of truth and righteousness. If an action or course of actions is not right, no advantage to be derived, no inconvenience to be endured should stand in the way of an absolute refusal. Loss, and even privation and suffering are to be preferred to sinning, however advantageous.

Slavery exists in the United States. States were received into the confederacy, stained and polluted as they were, with this enormous sin. The constitution recognizes the right of the

† "That nation has but feeble claims to virtuous illumination—to generosity—to justice, which tolerates, not to mention authorizing, the merciless robbing of a fellow mortal of all that is valuable to him, in life—his liberty." To this is attached the following note:—"While the United States stand, in point of justice and generosity towards foreign nations, upon a proud eminence; and the form of their government is the best adapted of any under the sun, to secure the rights of humanity; it is no small matter of regret, that their glory is tarnished with the black deeds of slavery."—*Duty of Nations*, p. p. 18, 19. Of the United States constitution, the testimony of the Church says,—"It establishes that system of robbery, by which men are held in slavery—deprived of liberty, and property, and protection."—*Historical part*, p. 136.

slave States to persevere in this immorality, and makes it obligatory on the free States to aid them in the recovery of their slaves when they may abscond.* The constitution provided, that for more than *twenty years* the importation of new slaves should not be prohibited. Thus, dealing in the souls and bodies of men, was made a lawful traffic by an article of the constitution.† The United States have, and still continue to permit slavery in the territories under their immediate jurisdiction, where there are no State claims to clash with the operations of the general government; and the United States permit slavery in the District of Columbia, over which they have original and sole jurisdiction. Here Congress have, delegated to them, all the municipal authority and residuary sovereignty which, in the case of States, are reserved to the local Legislatures.‡

To cover the guilt of the United States by representing them as only regulating by law, what they could not eradicate, is something we did not expect from a christian minister. But true it is—"To legislate respecting an evil which cannot be eradicated is not wrong. Slavery, such as that of which we complain, is an evil--it was always so; it was so in Israel; but was it the practice of the East, and interwoven with the habits of thought that prevailed among the descendants of Jacob. It is a mistake to suppose, that God approved of slavery in Israel, except as a punishment of crime. He no more approved of their general practice of slavery than of their hard-hearted divorces. Both were, in principle, opposed to his law of love. Yet, respecting both he legislated without *at once* abolishing either." If there be any meaning or force in this passage, it is, that slavery in Israel was so deeply rooted that even Almighty power *could* not eradicate it. And concerning what God *could* not eradicate, he has legislated. Did the Doctor seriously consider whither this would lead him? O, tell it not in Gath! It is bad enough to hide the guilt of slavery, but it is infinitely worse to pervert scripture, by making it the apologist of this hideous crime.¶ Domestic servitude among the Jews was not

* "No person held to labor in one State under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due."—U. S. constitution, Art. 4, Sec. 3.

† "The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing, shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight."—U. S. constitution, Art. 1, Sec. 9.

‡ "The Congress shall have power"—"To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of government of the United States."—Art 1, Sec 8 of the U. S. constitution.

¶ This cannot be considered too severe, if there is any value given to the opinion of one who, although not friendly to the christian religion, was so shocked with the evil of slavery as to say, "Indeed, I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever: that an exchange of situations is among possible events, that it may become probable by supernatural interference. —Jefferson.

of the same kind with negro slavery. It was a mere disposal of time and service for a limited period. "If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out, free for nothing."—Exod. 21—2. "And if thy brother, that dwelleth by thee, be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bond servant, but as an hired servant."—Lev. 25—39. In some cases it was the punishment of crime. Respecting the heathen nations, God gave the Jews command to make bond-men and bond-maids: this was not legislating about what could not be eradicated, but conveying a moral right to reduce them to servitude, because of their sins. Where such a commission cannot be produced, it is hoped no reference will be made to this. Servitude, as it existed among the Jews, was altogether different from negro slavery, and cannot without a perversion of scripture and an insult on the law-giver of Israel be considered as a precedent.* On the subject of slavery, the Holy One of Israel has indeed legislated, but it is in the positive prohibition of the sin and the punishment with which it was to be visited.—"He that steal-eth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."—Exod. 21—16. In the new testament "men-stealers" are classed with the vilest transgressors of the Divine law, for the punishment of whom the law is made.—I Tim. 1—10.

In the concluding part of the fourth letter we find an assertion, which we were not prepared to expect, even from Dr. McMaster. A similar assertion is made in the first letter, the consideration of which has been reserved till now, that both may be examined together. "In this land, assuredly no church, of which we have heard, has ever made the rejection of our civil institutions a *tessera* of fitness for her fellowship." "No christian could expose himself to censure before the well-ordered courts of the church of God, for associating with his fellow-citizens of the State, under such institutions, though altogether silent in respect to principles and ordinances peculiar to the system of grace." Has Dr. McMaster no knowledge of any thing of this kind? Has he never heard of such a "*tessera*?" Has he never heard of any member of the Reformed Presbyterian church paying fines rather than do any thing that could be considered an approbation of the moral character of the institutions of the United States? Has he never heard any thing of the common law and practice of this church, respecting her relations to the civil institutions of the United States? Has he never known of any member of the church called before a court "for associating with his fellow-citizens, under such in-

* You cannot argue conclusively in defence of negro slavery from the practice of the ancient Hebrews, unless you can prove, 1st. that the slavery into which they were permitted to reduce their fellow-creatures was similar to that in which the negroes are now held: and 2dly, that you have the same permission extended to you.—Sermon on slavery, by Dr. McLeod, p. 29.

stitutions?" If he cannot answer these questions satisfactorily, he may ask some honest and intelligent member of the church, who, we dare say, will be able to give all information.

It appears, that notwithstanding the many nice and ingenious things which the Doctor has said, he had some mis-givings as to the effect of his plea. And now, to make an impression on his readers, he dogmatically asserts what every intelligent member of the Reformed Presbyterian church knows to be untrue.

Hitherto we have examined the subject as to its truth. On this ground we have examined the Doctor's claims for the civil institutions of the United States; and we have ascertained that they are not entitled to the conscientious acknowledgment of christians—because they are defective, immoral, and not in subjection to Messiah. The question is now brought to another issue—Has the Reformed Presbyterian church recognized them as God's ordinance? We answer in the negative. So far from recognizing them as the ordinance of God, she has made separation from them a "*tessera* of fitness for her fellowship." The supreme judicature of the church has legislated on this subject:—"In the course of this session two acts were passed by the Presbytery which are important, as containing practical directions for the conduct of individuals, members of the church—an act respecting giving oath, when summoned before the constituted authorities of the nation—and an act respecting serving as jurors in courts of justice." The act of the Presbytery respecting serving on juries, is absolutely prohibitory. "There are moral evils essential to the constitution of the United States which render it necessary to refuse allegiance to the whole system." "Since the adoption of the constitution, in 1789, the members of the Reformed Presbyterian church have maintained a constant testimony against these evils. They have refused to serve in any office which implies an approbation of the constitution, or which is placed under the direction of an immoral law. They have abstained from giving their votes at elections for legislators or officers who must be qualified to act by an oath of allegiance to this immoral system."†

† Such is the legislation of the church on this subject, and such are the grounds on which she legislated. Historical part of the testimony p. p. 133 137 The record of these acts, and the reasons for which they were passed are recognized by the highest authority in the church. "The Reformed Presbytery do hereby ratify and approve of the preface and brief historical view of the church, with the proposed amendments and additions." With this sanction these become of equal authority with the doctrinal part of the testimony. Some men have a happy knack of getting up objections: we are told by such, that though the church passed these acts, and solemnly sanctioned their record, yet they are not terms of communion. These objectors have forgotten that "a regular life and conversation" is one of the terms of communion, and that the church, by her highest judicature has declared that the constitution of the U. States "is, notwithstanding its numerous excellencies, in many cases inconsistent, oppressive, and impious" Hist. part of the testimony, p. 136. How can "a regular life and conversation" be maintained and yet associate with that which is inconsistent, oppressive, and impious? Be it remembered, also, that one of the errors condemned by the testimony is "that it is lawful to profess or wear allegiance to an immoral constitution of civil government." p. 110.

Sessions in many congregations have applied the discipline of the church to individuals, for associating with their fellow citizens in the civil institutions of the United States. This establishes the fact, that the practice of the church is in correspondence with her statutes. Thus we have not only statute, but common law.

The approved writings of ministers afford a commentary on the law and the practice of the church. The author of the "Sons of Oil," after having given nine "reasons why we cannot yield obedience, for conscience sake, to the present civil authority in North America;" says "we ought to do no act which may justly be considered an homologation of their illegitimate authority. We cannot elect public functionaries to fill the various offices in the State; for between the electors and the elected, there is a representative *oneness*; so that every official act done constitutionally by the latter, is *virtually* done by the former, through his representative organ. He must also be introduced into office by an oath, homologating the constitution. Whatever, therefore, we cannot do ourselves, on account of its immorality, we ought not to employ others to perform."

The letters of Dr. McMaster are calculated to distract the members of the church, and divide them in sentiment, by breaking in on the established laws and practices of the church. At the present juncture, when the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian church has strong opposition to encounter from other sources, their publication was particularly unwise. It was not in obedience to the command of the Lord, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.—Jer. 6, 16. It was equally ungenerous: the writer of these letters, as well as others, had employed his talents, both by preaching and writing in defence of the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian church. In "the Duty of Nations" he had exposed the immoralities of the civil institutions of the United States, and was thus the means of instructing many a christian to keep aloof from them: it is, therefore, unkind now to disturb the settled opinion of these members of the church, and create in their minds the writhings of disquietude. They had been taught that, till the introduction of the millenium, no civil government would exist exemplifying God's ordinance of magistracy.* And now they are told that "no christian would expose himself to censure before the well ordered courts of the church of God, for associating

* "And though a lawfully constituted government could not be found, it would be no more than the christian has been taught to expect. During the forty-two months in which the holy city is to be trodden under foot, and the woman is banished into the wilderness, it would be in vain for any considerable length of time, to calculate on any other order of things. So far from this being an objection, it may be admitted as a truth—a truth which may be improved against the infidel, and which will bear equally hard on the advocates of every power that exists." Duty of Nations.

with his fellow-citizens of the State under such institutions." Who can calculate the mischief which may be done by such contradictory opinions? If a man feels disposed to vacillate from sentiment to sentiment; and though this should cause no uneasiness to himself, he ought to have compassion upon others. Those who look to him for instruction may not be prepared to throw away their convictions of truth at every movement of his magic wand: but it may be the cause of the most poignant suffering.

We have been induced to examine the letters of Dr. McMaster, solely by a sense of duty. The prosecution of this examination has afforded no personal gratification:—but however unpleasant the task, the testimony of the Redeemer demanded it; and personal feelings and considerations must be sacrificed at the shrine of truth. An attack was made on the settled principles and practices of the Reformed Presbyterian church. These principles we have repeatedly vowed to maintain; and, without a violation of our vows, we could not look tamely on, and make no attempt to defend the glorious, though despised cause of a Covenanted Reformation.

Before we take leave of our readers, we address a few general observations to the members of the Church.

DEAR BRETHREN:—The truth may be held in unrighteousness: it is so held, if either ignorance or prejudice influence a man in his preference of one opinion to another. It is but an empty homage to truth, to maintain it without knowing its evidence. Every prudent man endeavours to understand why he should prefer one opinion to another; he should be particularly so in the adoption of religious sentiments. Make yourselves, then, well acquainted not only with the doctrines of religion in general, but with those also that are peculiarly distinctive of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. These are not, as designing or superficial men would make you believe, something added to our common christianity; they form a part of it. Nor would they be worthy of your attention, if they were not a part of the Faith once delivered to the Saints. They are not the testimony of man in behalf of the truth; but a part, and an important part of the truth itself. They mostly relate to the kingly character of the Redeemer. The great body of Christians, while they maintain a testimony for the priestly and prophetic offices of Christ, show but little concern for his royal honors. They occupy, however, a prominent place in the sacred Scriptures; and they constitute a striking and distinctive feature in the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church; and because they have been trampled upon by the nations of the earth, her members have refused to associate in their affairs of government. Covenanters cannot, consistently with their testimony, swear allegiance to civil constitu-

tions framed in utter disregard to the claims of Messiah; nor politically incorporate themselves with such institutions. Study, brethren, those glorious truths which relate to the King of Zion, that you may be able to maintain an intelligent testimony in their behalf: and while the nations, and their rulers, practically reject his claims, and "take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, let us break their bands assunder, and cast away their bonds from us;" be ready to stand forward, the unassuming but intelligent witnesses for truth! "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."*

In the successful prosecution of your testimony, moderation will be found an important acquisition. Violence and passion are not the weapons by which truth is to be defended. They always injure its sacred cause. Not only is moderation necessary, as it respects temper and feeling, but also in the application of truth. None are more likely to become extremely erroneous, than those who, in the heat of an unmeasured zeal, have gone to right hard extremes. This is exemplified at the present moment. The men who have thought proper to change their opinions of the testimony of the Church, are, some, of them the very men who at one time were the most violent in testimony-bearing. The advice of Solomon, though apparently paradoxical, is fraught with salutary instruction to men of boisterous temperament: "Be not righteous over much." Moderation, in the sense in which it is now inculcated, is not only compatible with christian zeal and firmness, but by experience we learn that these cannot flourish except under its friendly shade. "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

In maintaining a decided and consistent testimony for the kingly honours of the Redeemer, you will meet, brethren, with much opposition. You are engaged in a severe and soul-trying struggle. You must prepare yourselves for encountering hostile opinion, and bearing the supercilious and scornful treatment of those who are at ease in Zion, as well as the ridicule and reproach of an infidel world. But "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the kingdom of Heaven." The jarring of opinion and the rudeness of reproach, are calculated to sour the disposition and render it unkind. Be particularly on your guard as it respects this. Avoid an uncharitable and misanthropic disposition. While you determinedly hold to the testimony of Jesus, and

* Examine the scriptures thoroughly which relate to this subject. By these compare the Church's testimony, and take advantage of such works as the following, to assist you in gaining an acquaintance with this important question: "Messiah Governor of the nations of the earth," by Dr. McLeod. "The subjection of kings and nations to Messiah," and "a Sermon on Civil Government," by Dr. Willson.

oppose with firmness the errors of others, cultivate feelings of charity towards the persons of those whom you are called to resist. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father in Heaven." Math. 5, 44—45.

In the heat of polemical warfare—in the excitement produced by the clashing of opinion, there is danger that the power of practical religion may become weakened. The incessant employment of the understanding in defending doctrinal truth, is apt to leave the heart uncultivated and unengaged. It may improve the head, but too often it leaves the heart cold and unaffected. With a great knowledge of religion, it is possible, after all a man, may not be religious. To know, and talk much of religion, is not religion. Real religion is deeply seated in the affections. A man cannot be religious without knowledge, but he may have knowledge without religion. This urges the vast importance of watchfulness, lest personal piety should decline. It is of delicate texture and may be easily hurt; it requires to be nourished by a continual intercourse with God, in the exercise of faith and love—a frequent retirement from bustling of dispute and the collision of sentiment—frequent meditation on the truths of the gospel in their practical efficacy—and much fellowship with God in earnest prayer. "Pray without ceasing." These employments will enlarge and strengthen the power of vital godliness in the heart, and assimilate the believer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The religion of Jesus is practical: its influence in the heart will always be illustrated by a proportionate power over the life and conversation of the believer. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Ye are called unto holiness. Exemplify the purity of your religion by the holiness of your lives, and an all pervading submission to the will of your Father in Heaven. Exert yourselves for the enlargement of his kingdom; and while the daily prayer flows from your lips, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," manifest by a holy life, that the kingdom of God *is come* within your own souls. And rest assured, Brethren, that however dark the prospect of your testimony may be at the present time, it shall finally prevail. "I will give power to my two witnesses, and they shall overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Your testimony is the cause of Christ, and he will arise and plead *His own cause*. The time to favor Zion is approaching. The Lord shall come out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ:" And "He shall reign for ever and ever." While your testimony, is in finishing, you have

the security that no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper. "There will I make the horn of David to bud : I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame, and upon himself shall his crown flourish. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

NOTE.—Since the preceding pages were sent to press a Proclamation has been issued by the Executive of the United States, by which the view we have given of the Federal Government is fully borne out. In this well-reasoned document it is clearly shown that the Federal Government is not a league of sovereignties, but a real and proper government. We give the following extract, as the conclusion to which the writer of the admirable article comes.

"The constitution of the United States then, forms a government, not a league, and whether it be formed by compact between the States, or in any other manner, its character is the same. It is a government in which all the people are represented, which operates directly on the people individually, not upon the States."

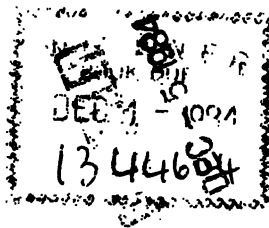




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